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ABSTRACT

A descriptive study provides information in seven sections on regional educational service agencies (RESA's) in Pennsylvania (where they are called Intermediate Units or IU's). The information is derived from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, various IU's, and initial introductory interviews with current and former state department staff. Formed as byproducts of an extensive program of school district consolidation conducted in Pennsylvania in the 1960's, IU's provide many services to school districts, primarily in special education and in the dissemination of new knowledge throughout the educational system. IU's have a complex organizational structure (60 percent, for example, have between 150 and 300 employees). Strong local representation in the governance of IU's ensures their responsiveness to local needs. IU's tend to be reactive when determining needed services, but they can also initiate services because of their access to advanced information. IU's are heavily dependent on state funding and have become accepted parts of the Pennsylvania educational system. They serve both large and small districts in large, sparsely populated regions and smaller, heavily populated ones. Tables show IU services and costs, income sources by IU activity areas, and characteristics of IU regions. Two figures provide estimated IU expenditure trends and organizational charts. (PB)

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REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AGENCIES SUPPORTING KNOWLEDGE UTILIZATION: THE INTERMEDIATE UNITS OF PENNSYLVANIA

William A. Firestone
Research for Better Schools

February, 1981

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INTRODUCTION

One of the unheralded developments in the recent history of American education has been the development of Regional Educational Service Agencies (RESAs). While these agencies differ substantially in their organizational structure and patterns of governance, they share a limited number of characteristics.

- They are placed midway between the local and state level of educational agencies,
- They facilitate communication among school districts and/or between school districts and the state department of education, and
- They provide some services to school districts.

The RESA phenomenon has a long history--the first RESAs, Delaware's County Offices, were started in 1829 (Davis, 1971)--but they have taken on new significance and a great variety of forms in the 1960s and 70s. A recent national study identified 31 networks of RESAs in 26 states (Stephens, 1979). Pennsylvania's RESAs are called Intermediate Units (IUs). The state is divided into 29 IU regions with one each for Philadelphia and Pittsburgh and another 27 each of which serves nine or more school districts.[1]

Regional Educational Service Agencies offer significant opportunities to improve the coordination of educational services in this country, but they are problematic as well. Their significance is partly as a communications device and partly as a mode of cost saving; school districts operate in an increasingly complex network where events hundreds of miles away

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[1]The Philadelphia and Pittsburgh IUs are administrative units within their respective school districts. All other IUs are independent agencies.

may have important effects on how children are taught. Modern school districts have to keep track of new state and federal regulations, the impact of recent court cases, new developments in the field of educational research, and new practices developed in neighboring districts that can facilitate their work. They often need assistance in generating and analyzing information on their own work as well.

RESAs can also facilitate economies of scale for school districts. Most states in the country seem to have reached the feasible limits of district consolidation but they still have many small school districts. Through joint purchasing agreements, multiple-district bus contracts, arrangements to serve handicapped students and cooperation to provide a variety of other services that school districts cannot provide feasibly alone, RESAs can permit students to be served better and less expensively.

The problematic issues that RESAs face concern finance and accountability. Because RESAs are mid-way between the state and the school district, it is not always clear what their responsibilities are to each level or which one should provide financial support. That there is no best answer to this question is indicated by the variety of governance arrangements for RESAs found throughout the country. Stephens (1977) has identified three different kinds of agencies: the cooperative, organized and supported by school districts; the regionalized SEA which is a branch office of the state department; and the special district with its own board of directors. Pennsylvania's IUs are special district agencies.

In December, 1979, Research for Better Schools (RBS) began a three year study of RESAs in Pennsylvania and New Jersey.[2] Because RBS' own mission is to help school districts in those states and Delaware apply the latest results of educational research and development to their own improvement efforts, this research focuses on the knowledge communication aspects of RESAs. Hence, the study asks how these agencies contribute to the use of educational knowledge in schools. This paper is the first report from that effort. Its primary purpose is to facilitate research planning by pulling together descriptive information on RESAs in Pennsylvania. (A similar report is being prepared for New Jersey.) While the report is intended largely to improve our own knowledge about RESAs in our region, it is being shared with staff of the Pennsylvania Department of Education, IUs in Pennsylvania, and school districts in hopes that it will provide useful background information to them.

Information for this report comes from documents made available by the Pennsylvania Department of Education and several IUs as well as initial introductory interviews with current and former state department staff and informal discussions with the staffs of four different IUs. Because this report was produced while field work for the larger study was under way, it has also been possible to draw on interviews with top administrators in a larger number of IUs.[3]

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[2]The study was initiated jointly by RBS and its funding agency, the National Institute of Education (NIE). The State Department has given its approval to the study, and the final study design was completed after substantial discussion with Department staff and the executive committee of the IU executive directors association.

[3]The final study will include 11 IUs as well as 12 RESAs in New Jersey. By the time it is done, a substantially larger number of interviews will be completed.

The paper has seven sections. The first describes the formation of the IUs. The second examines the mission of IUs. It identifies regulations and legislation that define the agencies' tasks and gives special attention to two related issues: the importance of knowledge use as part of the IUs' mission and the extent to which these agencies are reactive or proactive in their relationships with school districts. No special value significance is given to either the reactive or proactive stance, since each has advantages and disadvantages for the state department, IUs, and school districts. The third section examines funding levels and sources. The fourth looks at staffing and organizational structure, the fifth at patterns of governance, and the sixth at the demographics of the regions the IUs serve. A final section presents information on state orientations to IUs.

Formation of the Intermediate Units

The Intermediate Units were formed as a byproduct of an extensive program of school district consolidation that the state of Pennsylvania conducted in the 1960s. In 1963 when the critical consolidation legislation was passed, Pennsylvania had 67 county offices. It also had 2056 school districts. Only 956 of these were operating school systems, and just 192 were large enough to have their own district superintendents. The other 764 operating districts were wholly or partially under the jurisdiction of county superintendents. These county superintendents served partly as chief district administrator for these smaller districts, but also as a line of communication between district and state and as an agency for monitoring and enforcing state educational regulations.

By the late 1960's, the situation had changed markedly. The number of operating districts declined to 511 (there were 504 in 1979-80), and all of them had superintendents. Not only was the need for an external agency to serve as district administrator eliminated, but also the problem of state-district communication had been substantially simplified--though not eliminated--by the reduction in the number of districts. Even before this time, as district consolidation took place, the questions--should there be an intermediate level of agencies and if so what should their function be--had been raised.

A committee of educators, legislators, and representatives of local chambers of commerce put together to study these questions recommended that such agencies be maintained. At least two important changes were suggested. First, the mission of the intermediate agencies would be changed from administration and monitoring to providing service. On the one hand, the committee believed that even with consolidation, some services could not be provided effectively on a single district basis. Special attention was given to the problems of instruction in the fields of special and vocational education--areas then the responsibility of county offices (State Board of Education, 1967). On the other hand, the committee found that a number of PDE branches had regional offices that were spread throughout the state in an uncoordinated manner. It was hoped that the formation of IUs would reduce the need for such regional offices while providing across-branch coordination.

Second, the number of agencies was reduced. District consolidation reduced the need for an office in each county. There are currently ten counties in Pennsylvania with county-wide districts and 30 with five or fewer districts. Hence, it was appropriate to establish multi-county agencies. The original proposal called for 25 IUs. These would include single agencies that would be part of the Philadelphia and Pittsburgh school districts and three single county entities in the suburbs surrounding those major cities.

Opposition to the original proposal came from a number of sources. For instance, most of the larger school districts saw no need for IUs. These districts felt that they could provide most of the services the IUs would offer quite well themselves. They feared that an intermediate agency might maintain some administrative control over them or become recipients of funds that otherwise would go directly to school districts. Such opposition shaped provisions for the operation and funding of IUs in three ways. First, it was determined that IUs would be governed by boards elected by and from boards of education in their region. Second, it was determined that IU boards would approve the IUs' programs of services. Third, a complicated system for funding services outside the area of special and vocational education was developed. This system included an elaborate formula for state funding of IUs and provisions requiring member districts to purchase services above minimum levels supported by the state.

Nevertheless, when the IU legislation was presented to the legislature, it faced substantial opposition. This included continued resistance from the larger school districts as well as a variety of sectional interests. While some legislators believed that no IUs were needed, others felt that the IU concept might have merit if their counties had independent, unconsolidated agencies. The first IU legislation died in the state Senate. When the legislation was resubmitted, the number of IUs was increased to 29, including nine single county, multi-district units. This legislation passed, and IUs began operations in July, 1971.

Mission

The IUs have a mandate to provide a broad range of services to school districts in their regions. The description of the missions of two IUs by their executive directors in recently completed interviews illustrates this breadth:

> Our primary mission is to provide services to school districts, to encourage them to utilize services that they had not used previously or that they were unaware of....The function of the IU is to provide many and varied services to school districts that the LEAs cannot provide for themselves because LEAs don't have the expertise that the IU staff has and because LEAs could not efficiently, economically provide such services for themselves.

> We provide programs and services that no district can do economically and efficiently alone. We'll offer it. If you (as a district) want it, fine. If not, we won't force you. All districts participate and contribute.

These comments emphasize the theme of providing services where economies of scale encourage multi-district cooperation, but they do not identify service areas. In fact, IUs provide so many different kinds of

services that more explicit specifications of the mission of these agencies often tend to become listings of projects and programs. This diversity of programs is apparent in the legislation that governs the IUs. Much of this legislation authorizes or requires IUs to provide instructional services directly to students. For instance, the legislation establishing IUs specifies that all powers and duties vested in county boards or directors before 1971 with respect to special education and vocational education services shall be transferred to IUs. Through this transfer, IUs became the primary providers of special education and vocational education services in the state. Act 89 of 1975 specifies that IUs will conduct auxiliary services for non-public schools. These include guidance, counseling, testing, psychological, speech and hearing, and similar services (Dario, 1976).

Other mandates allow IUs to offer training and technical assistance and disseminate knowledge to schools in a variety of ways. For instance, the original IU legislation empowers these agencies to adopt programs of services including the following: curriculum development and instructional improvement services, educational planning services, instructional materials services, continuing professional education services, pupil personnel services, state and federal agency liaison services, and management services as well as any other services that would be approved by the IU's board (Dario, 1976). State legislation also allows the IUs to offer inservice courses that teachers can use to meet state certification requirements and, with the approval of the employing school district, to accumulate credits on district salary scales (Bellew, 1979).

The bulk of effort in IUs is devoted to providing instructional services rather than knowledge utilization support. This pattern is apparent in reports that the IUs prepare for the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE). Each year IUs submit a report which includes a description of each activity conducted (Cober, 1980). RBS conducted a secondary content analysis of these descriptions for the 1976-77 and 1977-78 school years (the most recent available).

Each activity was coded as falling into one of four service categories: knowledge transfer and utilization, instructional services, management and administration services, and other. Knowledge transfer and utilization services included providing curriculum materials, books, and films: audio-visual equipment repair; conducting inservice, teacher training, and staff development; and doing on-site technical assistance. Instructional services included both direct instruction and diagnosis, such as the provision of psychological consultation services for disturbed and retarded children. These services were usually in the areas of special and vocational education and service to nonpublic schools. Management services included bulk purchasing, consolidated data processing, assistance with negotiations with teachers' unions, the fiscal operation of programs, and grant seeking. Other services were primarily the operation of school bus and food services.

Two indices of distribution of effort among these types of services were possible with these data. The first was a simple count of the number of activities. Second, since each activity report included an estimated

expenditure, it was possible to examine the relative expenditure in each area. While there are a number of limitations to these data, they provide a general picture of the services IUs offer.[4]

These data indicate that the bulk of IU services entail direct instruction (Table 1). In both years, just over three-fifths of the specific activities were in that area while 18% were in the knowledge transfer and utilization area. However, substantially more funds are devoted to instructional services (88%) than to knowledge transfer and utilization (3-4%). It appears that IUs contribute to local knowledge use through a modest number of very small activities while the activities in the instructional services area are all of much larger scope.

A number of factors keep IUs from being entirely proactive or directive in their dealings with local districts. These include the mandate to provide service, the fact that a board representing school boards in the IU's region must approve the IU's program of services, and the need to obtain some financial contributions from local districts. On the other hand, IUs prefer not to see themselves as entirely reactive or responding to the expressed needs of school districts. They are frequently aware of new developments--either funding opportunities or regulations--

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[4]There are two primary limitations. First, the forms filled out by the IUs did not provide any clear definition of what constituted an activity. Some IUs combined reports on activities that others reported separately. Second, expenditure data reported by activity does not correspond to expenditure data reported by standard accounting categories. For some IUs, the discrepancy is as much as 15%. Our approach is to assume that any error in reporting is approximately evenly distributed. If that is true, then while it is not possible to know how much was spent on particular activities, the data do give a rough estimate of the relative expenditures in specific areas.

Table 1

Activities in Different Service Categories = 1976-78

Service Category	Number of Activities		Estimated Distribution of Expenditure (%)	
	1976-77	1977-78	1976-77	1977-78
Knowledge Transfer and Utilization	164 (18%)	162 (18%)	3.4%	4.0%
Instructional Services	548 (61%)	582 (64%)	88.3%	88.0%
Management and Administration	158 (13%)	143 (17%)	8.0%	7.8%
Other	27 (3%)	20 (2%)	0.3%	0.2%
Total	897	907	100.0%	99.0%

before school districts are; and they use this knowledge to anticipate district wants and to prepare to provide services.

Still, IUs vary somewhat both among themselves and among departments or projects within a single agency. Directors of IUs that take the most proactive stances describe their approach as follows:

> (The IU) seeks out needs and information at the state level and brings it back to the districts. It will work to stimulate a district to perceive a need. Then the district will seek help, and the IU will respond....Districts have to have ownership of problems and solutions. Thus, the IU creates the itches someone can scratch.

> What we do depends on the funding situation. The things we offer originate from funding people who come to us with requests....The majority of things happen because we think them up. School administrators don't have time.

One director also pointed out that if an IU serves enough districts, he can often feel confident in offering a new program because at least some of his numerous districts will pick up on the idea. Other directors describe a more mixed situation:

> We hit the middle of the road. If you impose your will, (districts) feel "you're telling us, not sharing with us." When we get a grant, we ask which districts would like to participate.

> If we're talking about a problem of school boards needing training and districts would say "we need to train our boards," we'll sit down and plan a meeting. Even planned kinds of things, like federal projects where there is an announcement of a grant, we'll sit down with the district and ask who wants to be involved when we are writing the proposal.

Finally, an example of a more reactive stance is provided by one director who said, "we are service oriented towards school districts.... We try to fulfill their needs."

IUs can be most proactive where there is some external stimulus to the districts, such as a new mandate that districts must follow or a funding opportunity. Even in these cases, the proactiveness of IUs is limited. In particular, they try to avoid setting themselves up as monitors. One Director of Special Education explains, "When our supervisor is out there (in a district), I have to remind him to do it the district's way, not his way. I have to be flexible in how he provides service." Similarly, when most IUs find an opportunity to be proactive by providing unexpected services through a grant, they are usually careful to line up districts on a voluntary basis. In areas where there is no mandate or special funding, IUs tend to be reactive. All in all, most IUs seem to avoid the purely reactive position; but there are built in limits to their proactivity. While they can employ extra-regional contacts to create a "need," they try not to lose touch with what their constituent districts want or will accept.

Funding

The Intermediate Units experienced dramatic growth from their founding in the summer of 1971 to the late 1970s as can be seen from data on expenditures during that period (Figure 1).[5] These data also indicate which service areas received the bulk of financial support. Expenditures

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[5] Data come from reports submitted by IUs to the Pennsylvania Department of Education. While the data for 1976-78 are reported in a constant format, a somewhat different procedure was used in 1972. Hence, comparisons between 1972 and the later years must be made with considerable caution.

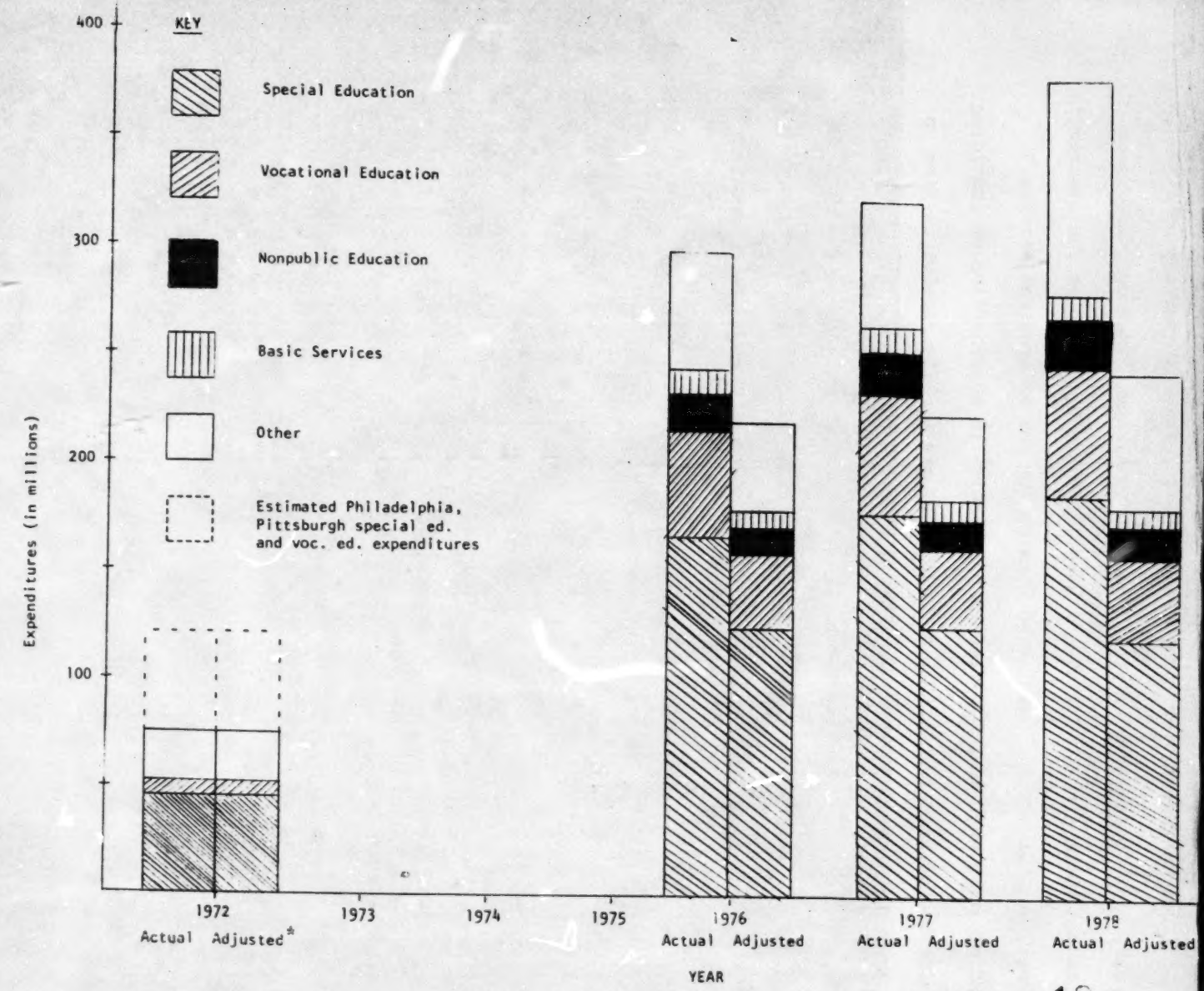

Figure 1. Estimated IU expenditure trends, actual and adjusted for inflation, 1972 through 1978.

Sources: Dario report (for 1972), Cober report (for 1976, 1977), and Act 57 Activity Questionnaires (1978).

*Adjusted expenditures are reported as constant 1972 dollars.

are reported separately for special education, vocational education, and nonpublic education--the three instructional service categories that account for most IU activities. Basic services reported entail most of the ongoing IU knowledge use service to schools. They include curriculum development, educational planning, distribution of instructional materials, and continuing professional education, as well as pupil personnel, state and federal liaison, and management services. "Other" includes education of inmates in prisons, institutions for delinquent youth, and state hospitals; pupil transportation; food services; general IU administration; and special projects not otherwise classified.

Between fiscal years 1972 and 1978, IU expenditures increased at a dramatic rate. When reported in actual dollars, IU expenditures tripled (318%) from $120 million[6] to $381 million. However, a substantial proportion of this increase is due to inflation. When expenditures are reported in constant 1972 dollars, IU expenditures only doubled by increasing to $245 million.[7]

Most of the increase in expenditures came between 1972 and 1976. During that time, the legislature required significant increases in IU activities in such areas as special education and nonpublic educational services. In fact IUs had no responsibility for nonpublic education when

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[6]Philadelphia and Pittsburgh special education and vocational education expenditures were not reported as IU expenditures in fiscal year 1972. To make our 1972 figures comparable, we estimated those expenditures using data in Dario (1976).

[7]Adjustments are based on the yearly consumer price index (CPI) in order to convert all figures to the equivalent 1972 dollars.

they were first formed. These additional services account for most of the increase in expenditures. Since 1976, increases in IU expenditures have been a modest 11% when inflation is taken into account.

When examining individual expenditure categories, the overall impression after 1976 is one of stability. Both vocational education and special education made dramatic increases in the 1972-76 period. However, after 1976 adjusted special education expenditures actually declined slightly while vocational and nonpublic education increased only modestly. Over this time period, the proportion of IU funds devoted to these three instructional services declined from 78% to 71%. Meanwhile, basic services expenditures remained relatively stable. The major area of growth was in "other" expenditures which increased 56% from $41 million to $64 million in constant dollars.

Income to IUs comes primarily from three sources:

- The state provides a small fund for general operations and another for capital expenditures as well as income for providing specific services, such as special education. The state also contracts with some IUs to provide specific services either statewide or to a multi-IU region.

- The federal government provides funds through competitively awarded grants for special projects. It also provides "pass-through" funds that come through the state, sometimes on a competitive basis and sometimes not.

- School districts also purchase services from IUs. Each year when the IU's budget is developed, individual districts determine what services they want in what quantity. When they want more services than can be provided through other sources, they agree to purchase those services. The state then withholds the funds for purchased services from each district's state subsidy and forwards that amount to the IU.

In 1977-78, approximately 84% of the IUs' funds came from the state, 11% from the federal government, and 4% came from school districts. A small amount of additional money came from interest, gifts, and miscellaneous other sources. These figures are essentially the same as they were for the two preceding years.[8]

Although the state is the primary funder of IU activities, this dependence tends to be concentrated in specific areas (Table 2). The data IUs provide on specific activities include information on the funding source for each one. For instance, the state is the sole income source for approximately half the direct instructional services, and these tend to be the largest and most expensive the state offers. By contrast, the state alone supports just over a tenth of the knowledge utilization activities. In 1976-77, approximately half the knowledge use activities were funded by the state and school districts together. This proportion dropped to a quarter in 1977-78. The increase for that year came in the "other combinations" category. Combinations that contributed to more than 5% of the knowledge use activities included "other funding sources"--such as private foundations--and the combination of federal, state, and district. The federal government alone supported about a fifth of knowledge use activities, and local districts alone supported about a tenth. Management and administration also deviated from the pattern set for instructional services. Here too the state-user combination was especially

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[8] Data for 1977-78 come from the 1977-78 summary questionnaires filled out for PDE by the IUs. Data for previous years comes from Cober (1978).

Table 2

Income Sources by IU Activity Areas[a]

(number of activities)

Activity Area	Knowledge Transfer & Use		Instruction		Management & Administration		Other		Total	
Year / Source	77	78	77	78	77	78	77	78	77	78
State	18 (11%)	21 (13%)	254 (46%)	333 (57%)	38 (24%)	46 (32%)	5 (19%)	5 (25%)	315 (35%)	405 (45%)
Federal	31 (19%)	31 (19%)	80 (15%)	116 (20%)	14 (9%)	15 (11%)	0 -	0 -	125 (14%)	162 (18%)
State/ User	84 (51%)	43 (27%)	150 (27%)	21 (4%)	75 (48%)	42 (29%)	19 (70%)	7 (35%)	328 (37%)	113 (13%)
User	20 (12%)	19 (12%)	10 (2%)	12 (2%)	13 (8%)	21 (15%)	1 (4%)	1 (5%)	44 (5%)	53 (6%)
Other Combinations	11 (7%)	48 (30%)	54 (10%)	100 (17%)	18 (11%)	19 (13%)	2 (7%)	7 (35%)	85 (9%)	174 (19%)
Total	164	162	548	582	158	143	27	20	897	907

[a]Data come from reports on specific activities submitted by IUs to PDE.

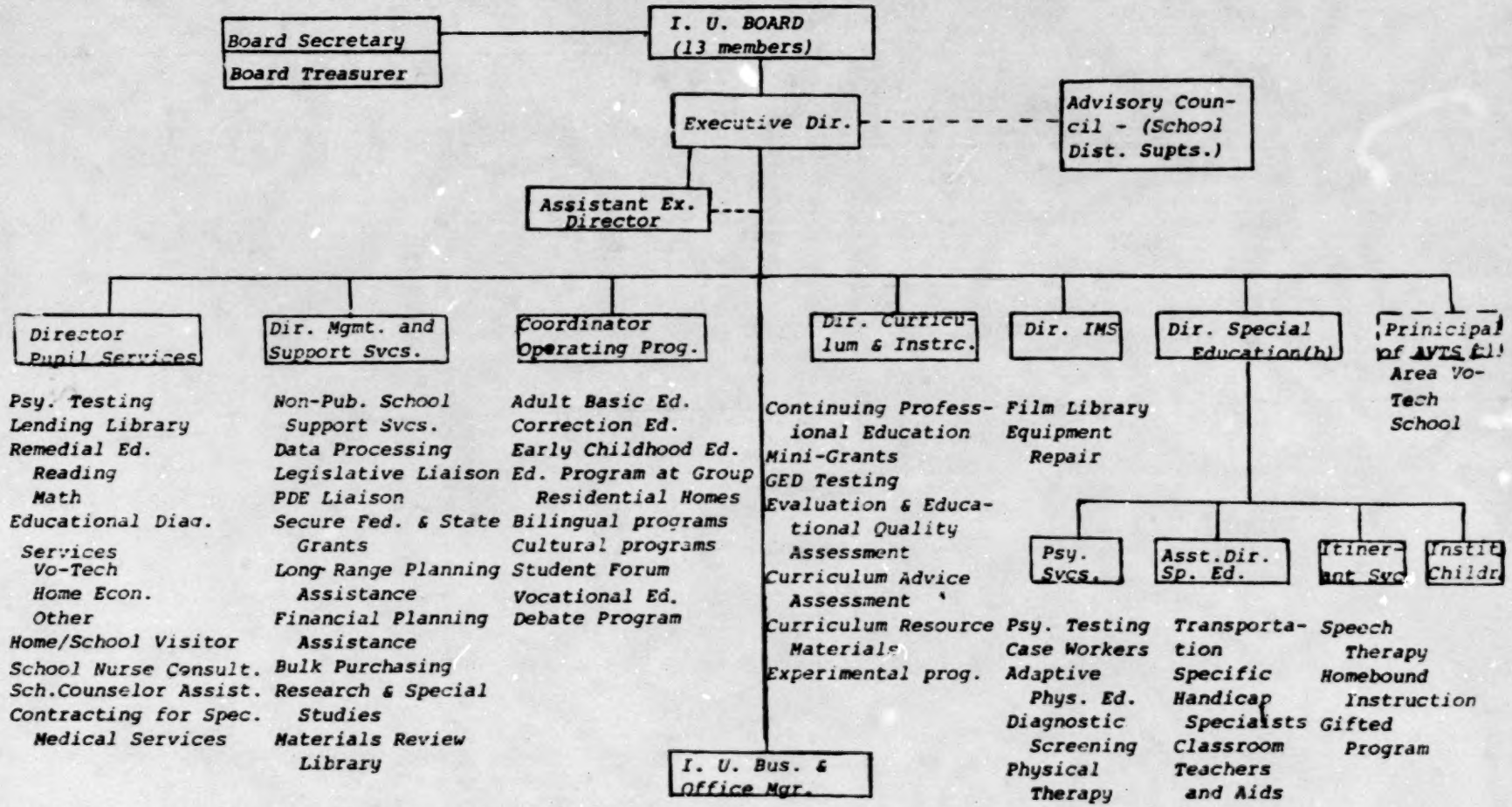
important in 1977 and less so in 1978. The state alone paid from a quarter to a third of these services, and the federal government was only a modest contributor.

Staffing and Structure

Intermediate Units are large organizations, and they experienced considerable growth in the mid-1970s. Excluding the Pittsburgh and Philadelphia IUs which only serve one school district each, the average IU grew from a total of 204 full-time professionals in 1975-76 to 241 in 1977-78. These averages hide considerable variation in IU size, however. For instance, in 1977-78, the largest multi-district IU had 855 full-time professionals while the smallest had 40. Sixteen multi-district IUs (60%) have between 150 and 300 employees.

As might be expected by their size, IUs have a somewhat complex organizational structure. Figure 2 presents a composite organizational chart for an IU prepared by a committee reporting to the Pennsylvania legislature (Dario, 1976). While it does not purport to be a "typical" organizational chart, it does illustrate all the functions performed by IUs and indicates how they are grouped.

Although there are no data on how staff are distributed among the four functions described earlier, it is clear that the bulk of IU staff work in the instructional area, particularly in the field of special education. A report prepared for the Pennsylvania legislature indicates that in 1974-75 74% of all IU staff worked in the area of special education. Here too there is variation, however. The proportion of employees working in special education ranged from a low of 50% to a high of 93%.



(a) This organizational chart does not depict any particular intermediate unit, nor even a typical intermediate unit. Rather it depicts typical intermediate unit organization and denotes the more common activities that may be conducted in each of the major categories.
(b) 74% of intermediate unit personnel are employed in special education positions.
(c) Only five intermediate units are operating agents for AVTS's.

Figure 2. Amalgamation of Intermediate Unit Organization Charts (a)

Governance and Program Direction

The IUs' program of service is determined through the interaction of three factors: required governance mechanisms that ensure responsiveness to local districts, state legislation authorizing IUs to operate specific programs, and the search for additional funding.

The required governance mechanisms include the IU board, the annual budget review process, and the intermediate unit council. Each IU is governed by a board of from 13 to 20 members. They are chosen from the boards of the districts served by the IU, and they are elected by school board members at an annual convention in April. The IU board hires the IU executive director and assistant executive director, adopts the IU's program of service, and is an adopter of the IU budget (Dario, 1976).

The IU's annual budget requires three distinct approvals before it is accepted. First, it must be passed by the IU's board at least one month before the IU's annual convention in April. Second, it must be passed by a majority of the school boards in the IU's region. Finally, it must be passed by a majority of the school board members. This vote can be taken at an annual convention, or the votes taken at separate school board meetings can be examined on an individual-by-individual basis.[9] Before school board members vote on the IU budget, the executive director is required to send them copies of that budget which indicate the share of costs above those provided by the state that is to be provided by each school district (Piatt, 1976).

In addition to the IU board and the annual convention, each IU has an intermediate unit council consisting of all district superintendents

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[9]Counting the votes board members cast at board meetings is a new procedure that became acceptable in late 1980.

in the region and chaired by the IU director. This council is required to meet at least five times a year, and its authority is strictly advisory (Dario, 1976). Nevertheless, the council plays an important role in IU program and budget development. Usually, the councils meet more frequently than required by law, and they become the forum in which annual budgets and programs are worked out. Two executive directors describe the council's role in the budget review process as follows:

> In November and December, we talk about the year's services because we prepare our budget in December and January. They decide what services they want. Without the superintendents' endorsement, the school boards won't endorse the budget.
>
> The main vehicle for the districts' input about what the IU's program will be is budget approval....The superintendents' council discusses and approves all programs before they go to budget approval since the districts support parts of these programs.

These councils also play a coordinating role for other advisory committees the IU operates. Either by law or custom, IUs have advisory committees in a variety of other areas, including curriculum and in-service and special education. These committees consist of school people working in specific program areas and they provide direct coordination with IU people working in the same areas. These committees are often a source of program ideas and information on what is needed, what is going well, and what is working poorly in the IU. While they are closer to specific program areas than the superintendents are, they have less of a sense of the overall needs of their districts or the IU's total situation. Hence, ideas for substantial changes, additions, or new directions that develop in these committees are usually routed to the IU council.

Not only does the IU council provide a means of preparing for board decisions and budget reviews, but it also provides a means for communications between superintendents and IU directors. Many executive directors extend this communications even further. For instance, several consult with superintendents before making critical internal personnel decisions. A large number of directors develop a variety of additional mechanisms for communicating with superintendents. Two describe their approaches as follows:

> I routinely visit every superintendent. I become a listener to local problems. It tunes us in.

> A lot of it is my personal formal and informal relations with superintendents. The informal will include chatting with superintendents in their offices....The more formal includes....giving an instrument with possible services to superintendents. For each service, it asks, are we doing it, and if so how well are we doing it? If no, should we? I know if we are providing a service, but this becomes a useful way to see if they know what we are doing.

In addition to these governance mechanisms, IUs must work within a framework established by Pennsylvania state laws, school board regulations, and court decisions. Some of these laws specify what services shall be performed. These specify that IUs shall provide certain special education services and aid to non-public schools. IUs are also authorized to operate area vocational technical schools (at least six did in 1976), and inservice councils through which they can give credit courses for teachers, and instructional materials services which provide film libraries for member districts. Other services are also authorized. Another body of legislation specifies state formulas for determining the subsidies

that support these services and help determine what services IUs can charge school districts for. Finally, there is a body of legislation and court cases that affect IU operations. For instance, most laws and regulations bearing on special education have a substantial impact on IUs even when these agencies are not mentioned. A summary of relevant legislation is found in Dario (1976).

Finally, the availability of special funding also helps determine what services shall be offered. Typically, special funds come from the federal government although IUs also receive grants from foundations and service contracts from the state. Still, some indication of the impact of special funding is provided by examination of the proportion of IU budgets that come from federal funds. In 1977-78, the median IU received 11% of its income from that source, but there was a good deal of variation. Two received about 5% of their income from the federal government while one obtained 37%.

Special funding can be an advantage or disadvantage. On the one hand, it offers the opportunity to offer additional services without asking member districts for larger financial contributions. On the other, it can promote two kinds of complaints. The first is that IUs are more growth than service oriented. IUs have continued to expand while school districts have experienced declining income and enrollments, a situation that can create bitterness. An extensive search for funding that further fuels growth can increase such bitterness. Second, there has been some concern in some parts of the state that IUs have been

drawn away from service to their regions by the search for additional funding.

Regional Characteristics

The Intermediate Units serve regions that vary a great deal in a number of respects. Table 3 illustrates some of this variation for the 27 IUs that serve more than one school district. For instance, the typical IU serves just under 20 different school districts. Still, the IU with the most districts has five times as many as the IU with the least. Most of these districts are quite small, however. Not counting Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, there are only 34 districts with 8,000 or more students in the state. These are fairly evenly distributed among the IUs, however. Just over half of the IUs (15 of 27) have one of these larger districts, and only one--Bucks County--has more than three. It has seven.

Student populations served by the IUs also vary considerably--from 23,000 to 177,000. For the most part, IUs serve areas with very small minority populations (Philadelphia and Pittsburgh have been excluded from this analysis). The average minority IU population is 5.0%; but that amount reflects a few IUs, often in suburban areas, with modest minority enrollments. Eleven of the 27 IUs (41%) serve areas with less than 2% minority enrollment while five (19%) serve areas with more than 8% minority enrollment.

There is also substantial variation in the income going to public schools among the different IUs, an indication of the potential financial

Table 3

Characteristics of IU Regions[a]

	High	Mean	Low
Number of Districts[b]	46	18.6	9
Number of Districts With More Than 8,000 Students[c]	7	1.2	0
Total Enrollment[c] (in thousands)	177.0	63.8	23.0
% Minority Enrollment	16.7	5.0	0.5
Revenue of Public Education Institutions[d] (in millions)	389.8	127.0	38.9
Square Miles[b]	3,914	1,671	169
Students/Square Mile	466	73	7
# of Institutions of Higher Education	7	2.9	0

a = Includes 27 IUs. Pittsburgh and Philadelphia are excluded.

b = Dario

c = CIC

d = state data for districts' area vocational-technical and special schools.

resources that IUs could tap. In the IU where schools receive the least income, they get only a tenth of what is received in the IU where schools receive the most. Taken alone, however, this figure is misleading. The high correlation between revenue in a region and enrollment (Spearman r = .98) suggests that financial resources are probably a function of the number of students. Between district differences in revenues seem to wash out at the IU level.

IUs tend to serve large areas, but here too there is a great deal of variation. The average IU serves an area of 1671 square miles making transportation costs and time a substantial consideration. However, the largest IU is better than twice as large as the average--a mammoth 3914 square miles--while the smallest is nearly a tenth of the average. As might be expected, population densities also vary a great deal. The IUs with the densest student population tend to be in the suburban areas surrounding Pittsburgh and Philadelphia.

Finally, the existence of alternative sources of knowledge about educational practice varies among the regions. In addition to the IUs, the primary sources of such knowledge are the institutions of higher education in each region. A simple count of such institutions must be treated with some caution for two reasons. First, some institutions are more geared to providing service to school districts than others. Second, school districts and IUs often approach colleges and universities outside the IU boundaries, including those in other IUs and in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. Nonetheless, most IUs share their regions with several

colleges or universities. Over a third (11 of 27) have two or three, and almost a fifth (5 of 27) have five to seven.

State Orientations to IUs

For the most part, intermediate units have become an accepted part of the Pennsylvania educational system. The state legislature had serious initial concerns about the system of IUs when it was first proposed. However, the IU legislation was passed the second time it was proposed. In the mid-70s, a joint committee of the state House and Senate finance committees conducted an investigation of the IUs. The findings of this committee were generally positive (Dario, 1976), and no new legislation resulted from that effort. Since then, there has been relatively little legislative interest in IUs.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) has generally been positively disposed to the IUs, seeing them as a useful service provider to school districts. Eight of the ten IU directors interviewed reported that PDE was, on the whole, "very supportive" of IUs, while the other two said the department was "moderately supportive." The Department makes extensive use of the IUs as a channel for communicating with school districts and as a means of support for state educational initiatives. For instance, Pennsylvania is currently initiating a new school improvement effort, and part of that effort entails providing technical assistance on planning to school districts. The state created teams of individuals from three agencies--PDE, colleges and universities, and IUs--to provide that assistance. The IUs are expected to be important sources of substantive assistance in most cases.

The contribution that IUs make to PDE initiatives varies from issue to issue. PDE cannot simply mandate IU activity because the governance structure of these agencies gives so much control to local school districts. However, as the authorizer of IUs and their prime source of funding, the department has substantial influence. A number of formal and informal mechanisms have been established for communication between IUs and the state. For instance, all IU Executive Directors meet with the department monthly to discuss policy issues relevant to their operations. Typically, arrangements are worked out so that the IUs provide information to school districts and offer assistance where districts want it, but do not monitor or enforce state mandates. This was the position that IUs took with respect to the recent school improvement program.

While PDE is generally positive about the IUs, a few respondents within these agencies distinguished between the relationships between the department's "rank-and-file" and the upper policy-making levels. These observers suggest that there are more questions about the utility of the IUs among policy makers than among others. The absence of a line authority relationship between PDE and the IUs which limits the demands the state can make may be the source of the questions that are raised about IUs.

Finally, it should be noted that even within the department the subject of IUs is rarely raised directly (although a PDE task force is currently examining the roles and functions of these agencies). Perhaps

equally often, the subject of IUs comes up indirectly as part of consideration of special education policies. IUs are the primary providers of service for special children in Pennsylvania; and, as noted above, the bulk of IU revenue is for special education. Federal legislation requiring the development of individualized educational programs and mainstreaming for the handicapped as well as court cases within the state have raised questions about whether primary responsibility for care of exceptional children should be transferred to local education agencies. To date this change has not been made. Were it made, it would have massive implications for the operation, and perhaps even the survival of Intermediate Units.

Summary

Pennsylvania's Intermediate Units provide a wide range of services to the school districts they serve. The bulk of these services entail direct instruction of students, primarily in the area of special education. In addition, through the provision of inservice courses, technical assistance, and a variety of other services, IUs also help disseminate new knowledge to schools and districts. The governance of IUs--a locally elected board, a superintendent's council, and local review of the budget--ensure that they will be responsive to the wants of local school districts. They tend to be reactive when determining what services to provide, but they also initiate services in new directions because of their access to advanced information on upcoming regulations and funding opportunities.

The IUs are heavily dependent on state funding. Four-fifths of their revenue comes from that single source, and most of the money is allocated to special education. Smaller contributions come from the federal government and local school districts. IUs experienced substantial growth in the early '70s, but when inflation is taken into account they have stabilized recently.

Finally, the IUs serve very different regions. Some serve very large, sparsely populated regions while others--especially in the suburbs of Pittsburgh and Philadelphia--serve smaller areas with large numbers of students. Almost all IUs serve a mix of larger and smaller districts.

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